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THE RAGTIMER

MAY/JUNE 1978

PUBLISHED BY
THE RAGTIME SOCIETY

DEDICATED TO THE PRESERVATION OF CLASSICAL RAGTIME

Eubie Blake
Original Classic
Waltzes
for the piano

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THE RAGTIME SOCIETY
INCORPORATED

is a non - profit corporation having the following objects:

To preserve classical ragtime music and to pursue such other activities as shall serve to maintain and develop interest in classical ragtime music and music related thereto.

RAGTIME
PERFORMED LIVE
THE WEEKEND OF OCT. 14, 1978
AT
THE RAGTIME SOCIETY
14TH ANNUAL BASH
AT TORONTO

(REGISTRATION PARTICULARS WILL GO OUT WITH THE NEXT ISSUE OF THE RAGTIMER)

RAGTIME...

UNDER YOUR HAT

The Mississippi Rag, The Voice of Traditional Jazz and Ragtime, afforded Amelia Lamb front page picture coverage in their February 1978 issue along with the caption, Toronto Ragtime Bash - 1977.

Page 1 carried numerous pictures of the excellent performers who manifested their talents at the Bash.

Our appreciation to WALT GOWER for the photos - long time member and friend of the Ragtime Society.

The inside cover of the Ragtimer reproduces the title page from the new folio "Eubie Blake Original Classic Waltzes"; a collection of eight compositions by the legendary "Grand Old Master" of ragtime. Available in the U. S. A. from Edward B. Marks Music Corp., New York, N. Y. 10019 or your local music outlet at $3. 50.

In the past we've featured many articles covering the broad spectrum of ragtime pianists, but the one thing they all had in common ... was a piano.

In this issue we present an article examining this neglected object of the ragtimer's skill.

Originally published in The Toronto Star October 14, 1972 "A PIANO IS POLITE" is made to order.

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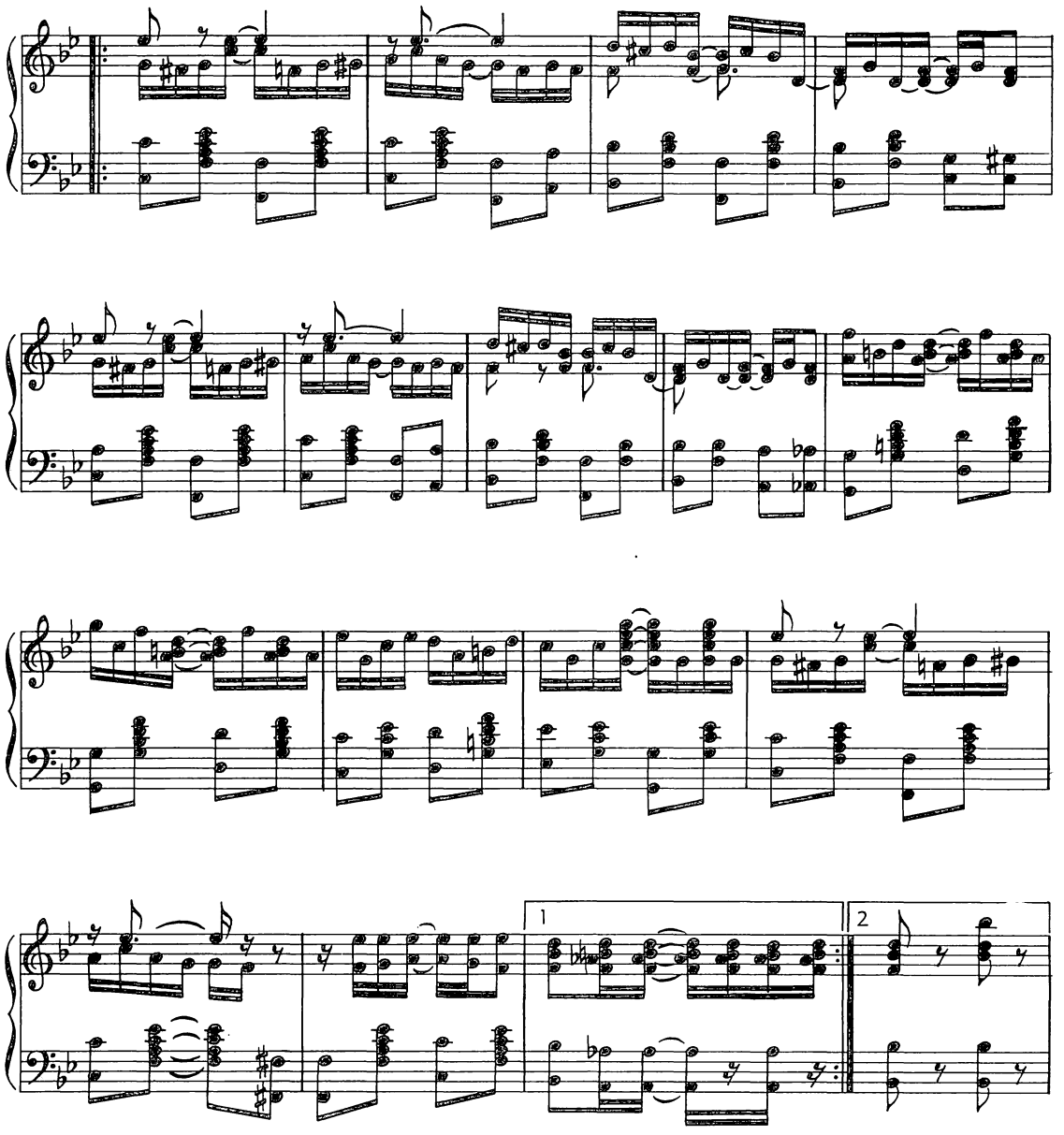
Recognize this delightful ragtime tune?

No! Try it on your piano ....

You still don't recognize it?

Here are a few hints ....

It is available as a "Ragtime Society" reprint.
It is also available on a "Ragtime Society" record.
It is one of several original ragtime numbers
performed by the composer on the above record.

NOW you've got it!

If not, turn to Page 14 for the answer.

RECORD REVIEW

by
TEX
WYNDHAM

Folkways RF 33 'Early Ragtime Piano 1913-1930'

Selections, Artists and, if known, Year of Recording: 1915 Rag-Mike Bernard, 1913; The Tramp Rag-Joe Batten; Delirious Rag-Harry Thomas, 1916; Breakin' The Piano-Vee Lawnhurst, 1923; Monkey Blues-Max Darewski, 1923; Fine Feathers, 1924 and Chimes, 1923-Willie Eckstein; Spring Feelin'-Donald Thorne; You've Got To Be Modernistic-James P. Johnson, 1930; Frog-I-More Rag, 1924 and King Porter Stomp, 1926-Jelly Roll Morton; Dusting The Keys-Harry Snodgrass, 1925; Try And Play It-Willy White, 1923 or 1924; Pianola-Frank Westphal, 1923; Doing The Dominoes-Ronald Gourley; Dancing Shadows-Raie Da Costa*.

Folkways RF 34 'Late Ragtime Piano'

Selections, Artists and, if known, Year of Recording: Rhapsody Rag-Winifred Atwell*; Estelle-Frankie Carie, 1940*; Snowflakes-Rawicz & Landauer, 1942; Grizzly Bear Rag-Wally Rose, 1947*; Grace and Beauty-Knocky Parker, 1949; King Porter Stomp-Jelly Roll Morton, probably 1939; Sweet Nothings-Billy Mayerl, 1929*; Coaxing The Piano-Ray Turner, 1952*; Kitten On The Keys-Freddie Slack, 1945*; Ragging The Chimes and Rock Island Rock-Mel Grant, 1950; Winter Garden Rag-Lee Stafford, 1950*; Smorgasbord Rag-Reinhold Svensson & Charles Norman, 1950*; Annie's Rag-Eddie Smith*; Billy's Rag and Poverty Rag-Billy Hamilton*.

*With rhythm or orchestral accompaniment.

Both Lps compiled and annotated by David H. Jasen. Available separately at $6.98 each (U.S. residents) from Folkways Records, 43 W. 61st St., New York, New York 10023.

There is a lot of excellent piano playing on these two Lps, most of it fast, cheerful, clean, and in the flashy 'novelty' ragtime style. Four or five tracks' worth of this impressive technique is noticeably submerged in the old recording processes and scratchy surfaces that can be expected on surviving copies of rare 78s (Lawnhurst's solo is particularly rough listening), but historical reasons nevertheless justify their reissue on microgroove ('Delirious' is Victor's first ragtime piano disc, for example). Some additional keyboard mastery is wasted on shallow, predictable, hokey interpretations (Atwell, Smith, and Hamilton).

What's left is a liberal helping of enjoyable tickling, including

undeservedly forgotten performances (Mayerl's crystalline articulation and relaxed mood makes the nearly-impossible sound easy for him; Turner's stomping rendition of 'Coaxing' is fully up to the brilliance of Confrey's conception) and some surprising twists on familiar titles ('Kitten' makes a fine, low-down boogie; 'Grace' is anything but graceful in Parker's funky, loose, earthy, completely successful improvisation). Most compositions are collections of complex pianistics, with Jelly Roll's works, 'Grizzly' and 'Winter' adding variety of a more melodic sort, while Grant's rags offer distinctive eccentricities intelligently interpolated into strains of straight-ahead stride. Special mention to the incredible James P., whose dazzling 'Modernistic', filled with white-hot Harlem licks, is the kind of cutting-contest killer that'll grab you even when seemingly hidden among 31 other superlatively executed numbers.

Overall, allowing for the negative factors mentioned above, I think each disc delivers value for the price. RF 33 has more attraction for archivists, while RF 34 is more fun for your middle-of-the-road ragtimer.

* * *

Pumpkin 104 'Harlem Stride Classics', piano solos by Donald Lambert

Selections: It's All Right With Me, The Trolley Song, Ain't Misbehavin', Daintiness Rag, Old Fashioned Love, Rose Of The Rio Grande, When Your Lover Has Gone, Jingle Bells, Keep Off The Grass, Carolina Shout, I'm Just Wild About Harry, You Can't Do What My Last Man Did, If Dreams Came True, How Can You Face Me, Russian Lullaby.

Available at $6.95 ($7.95 outside U.S.) from Pumpkin Productions, Inc., P.O. Box 7963 (Ludlum Branch), Miami, Florida 33155.

Most of Lambert's surviving work is preserved on informal recordings such as these 1959-62 solos, captured by fans in casual sessions embracing occasional background noise, sometimes indifferent microphone placement, and the often uncertain tones of various back-porch or other uncared-for pianos. Their musical merit transcends these deficiencies, as Lambert roars through 'Harry' mounting a richly embellished melody on a fast, light-but-driving left hand; riffs three incredible choruses of 'Dreams' over searing stride; delivers an encyclopedia of dazzling cutting-contest licks throughout 'Grass'; works a few quotations into his inventive ride on 'Lullaby', closing with a wall of scorching sound (how many hands did he have, anyway?); and otherwise leaves you slack-jawed - at least on side two (the monaural side, acoustically somewhat inferior to the stereo tracks on side one), all of which were played prior to Lambert's stroke in the fall of 1961. The later material displays first-rate technique but, understandably perhaps, less thought in terms of building cohesive and distinctive renditions; still, the shift to minor key for part of 'Jingle' will catch your ear, and you'll wish Lambert had felt like getting about 64 bars deeper into the flag-waving, ever-fancier, three-chorus 'Rose'. To sum up, Pumpkin 104 is a slightly flawed but rare and very worthwhile glimpse of a major talent.

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PLAY THAT
OL' RAGTIME REVIVAL

by Dean Tudor

Reprinted from LJ/SLJ Previews/December 1972

"Ragtime" is a musical form which contributed to jazz, even though it is outside the mainstream of American black music. In some respects, it can be linked to the 19th-Century minstrel shows which were usually the work of white entertainers. But these shows themselves were parodies of "coon" songs and tap dances - that old "blacks got rhythm" syndrome. A suspicion that ragtime was a response to a white demand is very valid, since its essence was the incorporation of black rhythms into European music forms. "Classic" ragtime is piano ragtime - and nothing more. As it is heavily syncopated and highly formal (i. e. written), it allows no scope at all for improvisation, although Max Morath has said, "One of the most elusive qualities of classic piano ragtime is its grace and charm; perhaps 'felicity' is the word."

Origins and Style

As written, ragtime piano music is notated and derived from European influences. The pattern is based on the rondo form of the minuet and scherzo. The "Maple Leaf Rag," for instance, has four different 16-bar parts, as: AA BBA CC DD, in which the third part (CC) is the featured tune. The distinctive polyrhythms are lilting syncopations, where the weak beats are accented, coupled with an unsyncopated major beat at the same time. The steady beat (2/4 or "march" time) lies in the left hand, while the syncopated beat is in the right hand. The latter thus plays eight beats in the same interval, with the third beat taking the accent. This is sometimes called the "secondary rag," and perhaps it was taken from the minstrel banjo.

Robert Kimball, in his liner notes to Eubie Blake's double album (Columbia C2S 847), describes these musicological devices in social terms: "In its piano music, which drew inspiration from the folk melodies once heard on the plantation banjo, the left hand, with its precise rhythms, was an articulation of the unyielding presence of the system, while the right hand, which sharply and often gaily accented the normally unaccented beats of the measure, conveyed a release from inhibition, a joyous affirmation of man's individuality. The juxtaposition of the two helped create a music whose depth of feeling and variety of mood reflected the agony of the past but spoke directly to the quickening of future hopes at the start of the twentieth century." This is completely at variance with the thought that ragtime was "white" music.

In style, ragtime was an extension of the cakewalk and the early minstrel tunes. In format, it developed from the march or quick-step played by brass bands of the era as funeral marches in duple time. Early rags were often noted as tempo di marcia ("in slow march time"). Later rags were simply noted as "marches".

Significantly, ragtime developed in the mid-west where marches were (and still are) popular.

Piano rags are easy to play if one can read music, but straightforward playing usually lacks expressiveness while being confined to the tempered scale. The better compositions are tricky, and a sense of rhythm is needed. To this end, a better than average pianist will improvise a variety of "rhythmic suspensions," unusual accents, and between-the-beat effects. The better pianists around the turn of the century did this, and rhythm pre-dominated, forcing the music into the jazz stream and into commercialism. The heavy march two-beat in the left declined and was replaced by four beats in the same interval, all evenly accented. Virtuosity crept in with complicated accents in the right hand, and the music became more danceable and "infectious."

"Rag" Any Tune

While piano ragtime may be limited in itself, it is possible to "rag" any tune. It became apparent that ragtime was one of several approaches to music, and for this reason it became popular for piano rolls and jazz bands. In this respect it is similar to "rock" music, for one can 'rock' any tune. Different instruments can also be "ragged". Although ads exist for guitar rag arrangements, no actual sheet music appears to have survived. The drawback of guitar rags is that all the notes cannot be played with the strings (12-string guitars suit the medium better, and duets are best of all). But here there are opportunities to use glissando, vibrato, and various tone colors to give the music a better lilt or melodic flow than the original piano pieces. The black bluesmen of the East Coast area were the leaders in this field (e. g. Blind Willie McTell, Rev. Gary Davis, and Blind Blake).

Other variants, parallel to the development of ragtime piano into stride, include the society dance band arrangements. Joseph Robichaux's band in New Orleans orchestrated hundreds of rags, cakewalks, and minstrel tunes. His outfit included violins, and performed music that appealed to the fashionable white audiences of the period. Similarly, Vess Ossman's banjo band and W. C. Hardy's society band orchestrated rags.

In 1896 or 1897, Tom Turpin, a Negro saloon owner and piano player, arranged for his "Harlem Rag" to be published. 'Ragtime" was used for the first time in 1898 with Fred Stone's sheet music for "Ma Ragtime Baby." That same year saw the first Scott Joplin published work. 'Original Rags," a medley of American Negro folk tunes. Then, in 1899, he wrote "The Maple Leaf Rag" (named after the Maple Leaf Club in Sedalia, Missouri), which quickly sold over a million copies. In 1902, Hughie Cannon published the first rag song, "Bill Bailey."

Father of Ragtime Music

Scott Joplin (1868-1917), the father of ragtime music, took courses in harmony and composition in Sedalia. His interest in music led him to assimilate

American and African Negro folk music with European devices into a city-folk music flavor and urban sound with country banjo and minstrel roots (not all of them "rags"). During his lifetime, he composed 504 piano pieces of all types and styles. In 1908, he even published a book detailing the secrets of playing ragtime.

In 1900, Joplin moved to St. Louis and came into close contact with the piano players there. Ultimately, this led to the decline of piano ragtime, although its best and golden age was probably 1904 to 1907 in the music centers of Missouri - Sedalia, Carthrage, St. Louis, Joplin, and Kansas City. Joplin believed that ragtime would be the "classical" music of America. He was once styled as the "American Chopin." Thus, he created two ragtime operas. The first, "A Guest of Honor" (1903), was never published and is presumed lost. It was performed only once in St. Louis, as a sort of "tryout". The second, a three-act opera called "Treemonisha" (1911), was published but performed only once (1915, in Harlem).

"Treemonisha" is for 11 voices with piano accompaniment. It contains 27 selections, including an overture and a prelude to Act III. The action is at an Arkansas plantation and concerns Treemonisha, an 18-year-old child who is starting on a teaching career. Essentially a folk tale or a fable about the Negro people, it deals with her abduction, rescue, and subsequent leadership role. It is an overt call for the American Negro to assert himself and to lead his people.

James Scott (1886-1938) and Joseph Lamb (1887-1960), Joplin's two most famous disciples, were perhaps better composers in the piano medium than Joplin himself. Scott, in particular, had a filigree treble that called for incredible technical skill and discipline.

Blossoming of Ragtime

It is difficult to say precisely why ragtime blossomed. Certainly a major factor was because anyone could play it at home. And sheet music was available to everyone at a cheap price, long before the phonograph. John Stark and Son of St. Louis published Joplin and anyone else who had Joplin's endorsement. Soon after "The Maple Leaf Rag" was printed, the band wagon rolled onwards. Quadrilles and marches were republished with the word "ragtime" hastily over-printed on the cover or title page. Ragtime became featured in virtually all forms of entertainment. It was played at the various World Fairs of 70-odd years ago: Chicago, St. Louis, Buffalo, and Omaha. It carried the "Cakewalk" with it, and this part-shuffle part-dance became incorporated into the ragtime milieu, sweeping the nation and taking London and Paris by storm. Sousa featured the music on his post-1900 European tours (e. g. "At a Geogian Camp Meeting" cakewalk). Debussy wrote "Golliwog's Cakewalk," and Stravinsky wrote "Piano-Rag-Music" and "Ragtime for 11 Instruments." Even now, when the musical director of a film sequence wants to emulate the mood at the turn of the century, he will invariably write or use "raggy music."

None of the pioneers ever made phonograph records. Although they cut numerous piano rolls, many of these rolls were subject to post-cutting changes (such as added embellishments). Thus, it is difficult to envision how exponents such as Turpin, Joplin, and Scott sounded. The closest we can come is either in the recorded works of Luckey Roberts, Jelly Roll Morton, and James P. Johnson, or in the later recorded works of Joseph Lamb and Eubie Blake. However, the former group were not ragtime exponents, but they did use the idiom, expanding and improvising on themes. Blake and Lamb were recorded late in life, at a time when both memories and fingers can so often fail.

Demise of Classic Ragtime Piano

Classic piano ragtime died with Joplin in 1917. It is not easy to determine the causes for its disappearance, except that it had assumed other forms. The happy spirit of the early part of the century dissipated with the discontent of the intellectuals, social inequalities, and the War. (In passing, it should be noted that these three conditions are still here). Perhaps the major contribution to ragtime's demise was its overcommercialization by Tin Pan Alley. Exploited "rags" were mostly quickly moving numbers designed to give play to their melody and pianistic virtuosity. As a result, "novelty rags" were composed, published, and recorded. These were turned into dances, stomps, and fast blues.

As they were so locally based in the American midwest and essentially written rather than improvised, piano rags tended to be unrecognized as jazz. It took the development of the stride piano plus the ability to "rag" tunes to assimilate the music and the form into the stream of jazz.

Jazz Infused Ragtime

The swinging atmosphere of St. Louis quickly produced the even four beat left hand, and the jazz infusion of ragtime was on its way. Jelly Roll Morton added melody to the bass (called a "walking bass") and further refined the accents between the right hand beats. In Harlem, as elsewhere on the East Coast, the house party (or "rent party") crowd, although slightly different from the Storyville sporting houses, picked up syncopation and the walking bass and, through cutting competitions, there evolved the "Stride" piano of James P. Johnson, Luckey Roberts, Willie "The Lion" Smith, and Fats Waller. It was at this point that piano ragtime, absorbing too much jazz, became an actual part of jazz.

The fragile pattern of ragtime became subsumed by the filling out of the chords and the influence of the blues. Indeed, many a blues piece of the 20s could well have been a jazzed-up rag piece of a decade earlier (e. g. "Wolverine Blues"). James P. Johnson, while employing ragtime and blues in a heavily percusive style of performing (no doubt to get the music heard over the room's noise), also participated in the classical vein that Joplin wanted to pursue. Johnson had composed very complex choral works, piano concertos, and symphonies in rag style. Where these are today no one seems to know.

A definite break with the past was established after the War, and this included piano ragtime. Under the guise of "America grows up," this type of music was replaced by (or assimilated by) jazz. Fitzgerald's "The Jazz Age" bloomed in the 20s, augmented by popular blues. The phonograph made orchestral music available, and the radio made music common. Soloists found little work, except as part of larger units. "Rags" were transcribed for bands and the syncopation softened into a flowing stream of four even beats. Jelly Roll Morton had changed the music, and the stride pianist had refined it. In any event, piano ragtime was never played again on a major scale such as at the turn of the century.

Commenting on ragtime, John Norris, editor of Coda, wrote in December 1971: "The original exponents were black musicians and their special qualities helped make the music unique. When the music passed into the hands of the general population it changed considerably. What was originally a sophisticated, complex piano music became a brittle, flashy - indeed raggy - music. It was orchestrated, it was played by brass bands, it was interpreted by banjoists and eventually, in a much simplified manner, was bashed out on out-of-tune uprights by pianists who could hardly stumble through the simplest of material. The subtlety of the original modulations, delightful melodic twists, and underlying harmonic patterns was replaced by a glorified jollity."

The odd resurgence, such as that of the mid-40s West Coast, tended to emphasize the honky-tonk-ricky-tick tone, and often pianos were deliberately put out of tune to give it that cheap characteristic "piano roll" sound. It was this sound that let Johnny "Crazy Otto" Maddox to the top of the hit parade in the mid-50s and influenced other pianists.

Classic Piano Ragtime Revival

Piano Ragtime in the modern age has fared fairly well on television. The 1959-1960 season of NET featured Max Morath's Ragtime Era (12 shows), followed by a 15 show Turn of The Century in 1961-1962 for the same network. NBC had one hour in 1962 - Those Ragtime Years - with Hoagy Carmichael, Eubie Blake, Ralph Sutton, and Dick Wellstood. A 1964 Bell Telephone Hour featured Max Morath and Bob Darch. And then in September, 1970, there was a long interview-performance between Morath and Eubie Blake for NET.

The centenary of Joplin's birth (1968) passed by without any notice. Even now there is no biography of this great composer in sight. For the moment, there is a Scott Joplin memorial in the library at Fisk University, Nashville, most of which came from Brun "The Original Ragtime Kid" Campbell. And last year, the Beverly Hills Public Library had a display of Scott Joplin and ragtime generally. Each year there is an annual recital of Joplin's music in Sedalia, Missouri, but this appears to be an entirely local event, and even this is not too well-attended.

What undoubtedly started off the current revival in classic piano ragtime was the Nonesuch release of Joshua Rifkin's 1970 record of Joplin compositions. This was the very first time that a nationally distributed classical music recording company acknowledged the existence of piano ragtime. Previous to this, classical ragtime was only released if it was written by a serious composer, such as Stravinsky, in the traditional setting. All other versions were relegated to jazz or folk collections. Nonesuch could easily have released their disc in its "Explorers" or folklore series. Of course, then it would have gone unnoticed by collectors of classical music. The Rifkin album turned on Harold Schonberg who subsequently wrote a glowing column for the New York Times (January 21, 1971).

There was a "boomlet" of sales, and Nonesuch released two other albums. Slowly, but surely, piano ragtime had come back, if not to its former pinnacle, then at least to a point of recognition as American classical music, to be featured now and then, and to be played whenever the spirit is moved.

Hearing these "rags-as-written" by modern performers, and hearing rags as played by those around at the time (e. g. Joseph Lamb and Eubie Blake), the listener cannot help noticing that the rags are totally unlike the music which is generally accepted today as "ragtime" (i. e. jazzed up honky-tonk music). Piano ragtime has been accepted and played by academics, intellectuals, and professionals in much the same way as recorder music was accepted and played fifteen years ago. Rags are relatively easy to play, and there is that stamp of "authenticity" as they have been shown to be classically derived.

In 1968, at the University of Tennessee in Nashville, Joplin's ragtime opera "Treemonisha" underwent a sort of revival with an all Negro cast. Later (October, 1971), excerpts were performed in New York City, conducted by John Motley. And then, as part of a festival week to honor music of black Americans, it received the full treatment in Atlanta, Georgia, on January 28 and 29, 1972. Robert Shaw led the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra through a version of the piano part, orchestrated by T. J. Anderson. The complete score for voice and piano is now available in facsimile form.

Current activities in the ragtime revival include the National Ragtime Festival each June in St. Louis (now in its ninth year). The Ragtime Society, Inc. has had an annual event each October in Toronto, Canada for the past eight years. Both activities feature sterling music, get togethers, workshops, seminars, and so forth. A fully choreographed version of Joplin's Rag Time Dance was recently performed at Columbia University. Joshua Rifkin and William Bolcom have presented many concerts of ragtime music in and around New York. Bolcom has played a selection of his rags in "Black Experience," a musical presented at Powell Hall in St. Louis.

As for professional performers, there were steady gigs for local specialists around the Detroit (Mike Montgomery), New England (Tex Wyndham),

Toronto (John Arpin), California (Bob Darch), and St. Louis areas. Max Morath broke into popularity when he formed 'Max's Original Rag Quartet" at the Village Vanguard in New York City (June, 1964). He subsequently mounted his "At the Turn of the Century" one-man show, opened on Broadway, and then toured. Eubie Blake has a three disc series of his music on his own label. In June, 1972, he was honored at a festival in Boston celebrating black music in America. Other performers are noted in the discography.

Two major ragtime clubs are widely supported around the world and feature newsletters, rags, get togethers, and sources for records and books. The Ragtime Society was established in the Toronto region in 1962 and incorporated in 1970. While it undoubtedly does more business than the California-based Maple Leaf Club (through its reprints, records, and so forth), it tends to be more of a purist-oriented group. Both clubs avow "dedication to the preservation of Classic Ragtime."

The Future of Ragtime

What about the future? One would suppose that displays and annual festivals would continue. Sheet music (or reprints) would continue to sell well. Perhaps there will be commercial television acknowledgement. There would also be a resurgence of piano ragtime duets (something that has not yet been recorded, as guitar rags have been). The annual festivals may become more scholarly as the academics move into the field, ever searching for topics for dissertations and the like. A biography of Scott Joplin and other ragtime composers will be written. Ragtime will be incorporated into folk festivals (this has already happened at the 1972 Mariposa Festival, in Toronto). Some interest may be generated among black Americans. After all this, piano ragtime will probably retire to its niche as a form of serious piano composition, the ragtime era will be fully documented, everybody will have had a good time, and the crowd will move on to something else. But certainly piano ragtime will never be forgotten again.

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DICK HYMAN AT ART PARK

Dick Hyman, who for a number of years has played piano at "The Cookery", the famous jazz centre in The Village, N. Y. C. and who provided the piano sound track for the movie "Scott Joplin" will appear at "Artpark" Lewiston, N. Y. on July 28, 1978 at 8. 00 PM with The Perfect Jazz Repertory Quintet with Bobby Rosengarden, Milt Hinton, Pee Wee Erwin & Bob Wilber and on July 29, 1978 at 2. 00 PM featuring the History of Jazz Piano from ragtime to avant garde. Tickets $3. 00 and $4. 00 from Artpark, Box 302, Lewiston, New York 14092. Enclose self-addressed stamped envelope.

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The title of the ragtime sampler printed on Page 4 is "Prairie Queen" and the composer ... Tom Shea.

Tom Shea was born in Illinois, in 1930, well after the original ragtime craze had subsided; in fact, he first heard this happy infectious music in the late 1950's, and was immediately addicted to the syncopated rhythms and lilting melodies of classic ragtime. The trouble was, he found it hard to come by the sheet music ... so he wrote his own ragtime.

Tom's music is born of a classical music background and infused with a spirit of discovery. The tunes are modern, yet traditional ... blended to create an exciting but disciplined ragtime style.

Discover Tom Shea's music for yourself through the "Ragtime Society" reprints:

SR-003	Spasm Rag	at $1.00
SR-004	Prairie Queen	at $1.00
SR-059	Storyville Sport	at $1.00

or through the "Ragtime Society" records:

RSR-01 Classic & Modern Rags by Tom Shea.. at $5.00

Spasm Rag	Stoptime Rag
Hasty Pudding	Euphonic Sounds
Venial Sin	St. Louis Rag
Johnny Walker Rag	Something Doing
Prairie Queen	Pineapple Rag
The Storyville Sport	Original Rags
Black Mike's Curse	

RSR-02 Prairie Ragtime by Tom Shea ..... at $5.00

Mississippi Rag	R. F. D.
Ma Ragtime Baby	Oliver Road Rag
Swipesy Cakewalk	Trillium Rag
Creole Belles	Corinthian Rag
Peg Town Patrol	Rosebud Rag
Brun Campbell Express	

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A PIANO IS POLITE

Genteel. It gives your home class. And if you can play it, so much the better

BY ROBERT THOMAS ALLEN

Reprinted from THE TORONTO STAR
OCTOBER 14, 1972.

In these days of the electric guitar, the piano has lost its place in the living room and is often relegated to the cellar, along with the bar, billiard table, silent movie stills and coffee tables made from old revolving piano stools. But the piano is still the giant of solo instruments, almost indispensable in teaching harmony; the instrument of composers as far apart as Mozart, Jelly Roll Morton and John Lennon. Parents still want their kids to take piano lessons. Teachers are booked solid. Every school has one or two pianos - new ones, not the clinkers of 15 or 20 years ago - and school boards order them in lots of 30 or more.

The principal change in piano styles is the reduction in size. The old uprights were monsters as high as five feet, weighing 700 pounds. They were abandoned partly because the floor beams of some low-down-payment postwar homes began to sag under their weight, but chiefly because women wanted something that took less space, could be moved without gouging grooves out of the floor, and matched the modern furniture. The smallest of the uprights, the 50-inch piano called apartment-size, has shrunk even further to a 375-pound piano 40 inches high. It's called a console and is the standard upright piano of today. But the old uprights had a tone that's not equalled by the new models, and reconditioned, they're always in demand for anything up to $850.

A piano workroom smells of maple frames, spruce soundboards, lacquer and sandpaper dust and gives the impression of a woodworking shop where one of the carpenters stands pounding on a piano with one finger instead of working. But he's a skilled technician painstakingly bringing each of 226 strings up to pitch. This is the first rough tuning to take the stretch out of the strings. Three or four times, they're brought above pitch then brought down to the true pitch by rubbing with a leather-covered stick. After this a fine tuner takes over. Often he's blind, and always he's gifted with an ear for pitch far sharper than yours or mine. Many piano tuners can't play the piano, but occasionally they get intrigued to the point of learning, although they're likely to bypass the lessons and play by ear.

The strings of a piano are under tremendous tension - 40, 000 pounds in a concert grand, or enough that if the strings were attached to a steel ceiling beam at one end and a load of pianos at the other, they would hold 106 modern console pianos off the floor.

Most of the sound is produced not directly by the strings, but by a ribbed soundboard made of diagonally-fitted spruce strips precisely engineered to pick up the vibrations of the strings. The entire assembly is under tension and very sensitive.

If a workman pops a paper lunch bag it sets the strings of a piano 15 feet away sounding eerily. So will the motor of a basement oil burner, the origin of many piano-playing ghosts.

The piano was invented in 1709 by a Florentine instrument maker named Bartolomeo Cristofori. It was a departure from its predecessors - the clavichord and harpischord - in that it could be played soft, "piano" and loud, "forte", depending on the player's touch, which gave it its original name, the "soft and loud", piano e forte. It was ignored for 60 years and resisted by harpischord makers, who said it would put craftsmen out of work. Johann Sebastian Bach, who played a clavichord with the barely perceptible finger movement of someone using an electric typewriter today, wasn't overly enthusiastic about it. But one of his sons, Johann Christian Bach, began its popularization in England in 1768.

The player piano of the early 1920s was a peculiar combination of music and physical sport. The player got a grip under the keyboard with his fingers to keep from sliding backwards off the stool, and pumped a pair of foot pedals. The piano keys moved before his eyes, as if played by spirits, operated by puffs of air forced through perforations in a sheet of shiny paper about the size of paper towelling that wound off a roll, in plain view if you opened a pair of sliding doors and watched it. The player could, and usually did, let go his grip now and then and make fancy passes over the keyboard pretending he was actually playing. If his legs got tired, or he got careless and started to talk to somebody, the music slowed down and started to puff until he got the pressure up again.

Player-piano rolls were hacked out by professionals who could play anything, usually in ragtime, although some serious music was composed for the player piano by Debussy, Stravinsky, and Hindemith, who wrote Toccata For Mechanical Piano. The original player pianos are now collector's items; most of them patched up with string and Scotch tape because piano companies don't like to repair them. When dealers get them they take the works out and convert them into regular uprights. Modern player pianos operated by electric motors are made in the U. S. by Wurlitzer and sell for $1,800, and you can buy electrically-operated portable player units that fit over the keys of a regular piano.

"Tickling the ivories" is hard on the elephants

Jazz originated partly from a style of piano music called ragtime, which was developed in the American midwest by a black student of classical music in the town of Sedalia, Mo. - Scott Joplin the composer of Maple Leaf Rag - and was orchestrated into band music by, among others, Jelly Roll Morton, a pianist in a New Orleans brothel called Lulu White's Mahogany Hall. Ragtime soon reached the commercial music-publishing world of New York and music companies employed pianists to cut player-piano rolls in ragtime. It was sold in sheet music form across the continent, reached Europe and became the rage of London and Paris. Everybody played ragtime. Piano players in the bars and brothels of our frontiers played ragtime - in the Klondike, an upright piano made in Hong Kong was hauled over the

Chilkoot Pass, piece by piece, the sounding board wrapped in wool. The sound of ragtime coming from saloon of the man who bought it helped make him $30,000 the night he opened. "The kid that handled the music box" in Robert Service's poem, The Shooting of Dan McGrew, played ragtime. Ragtime held the stage from 1896 to 1917, then degenerated into one of the most monotonous though cheerful forms of music ever invented.

In the early part of this century, piano keys, along with billiard balls, were the mainstay of the ivory trade and contributed to the slaughtering of elephants. Ivory piano keys were discontinued in 1942, partly because the priority of war supplies interrupted the industry, and now keys are made of a plastic, which works better than ivory. It doesn't turn yellow or wear into notches at the front edge or, as the key is all one piece, become unglued and flip off the way the old two-piece ivory keys did. Professional pianists like the plastic keys better. They're easier to slide the fingers on, yet not so slippery when they get sweaty. A customer can still buy a complete set of ivory piano keys and have them installed for $125, but hardly anybody does.

Learning to play the piano is still advocated for children as an antidote for everything from laziness to hanging around shopping plazas. Piano dealers and teachers claim that it develops muscular control, musical appreciation, a sense of discipline, and the ability to withstand a certain amount of boredom. Most parents go along with the idea wholeheartedly and start their children as soon as they're old enough. One mother I met, ready to send her eighth, phoned the piano teacher and said: "How many do I have to send before I get one free?"

But there have been important psychological changes regarding a kid and the piano. The folk legend about the red-blooded boy practising piano and looking longingly at a ball game is no truer than most legends. There were always some boys who loved piano and hated baseball, and today a boy getting let out of school early for a piano lesson is no longer the victim of jokes as he used to be. Children learn the piano at school, where group instruction is considered an important step in piano instruction. It overcomes shyness, gives wholesome competition, and children who resent teachers will often take criticism of their playing from their classmates.

The tune gave way to the sexy cover

Piano sheet music was in tremendous demand in the 1920s and 1930s. The sheet music department was one of the most important in a store and was always located on the main floor near a door to the street, where the sound of the piano played by a salesclerk carried out on to the street. A customer picked out a sheet of music, handed it to the clerk and said, 'Will you play this, please?"

Noon hour was the big time, and listening to music store pianos kept as many people late getting back to work as bars do today. Sheet music sold for 15 cents, or 25 or sometimes 35, and kept commercial artists busy designing covers that went

in strongly for moons, canoes, palm trees, and country lanes. The First World War song K-K-K-Katy, composed by a Canadian named Geoffrey O'Hara, sold 1,000,000 copies.

Piano sheet music now sells for $1.25. It's bought chiefly by guitar players, who want it so that they can learn the chords indicated above the staff. Cover designs have changed completely. Love is more physical. Romeo And Juliet shows Romeo and Juliet in bed; Scarborough Fair Canticle shows The Graduate framed beneath Mrs. Robinson's leg; We're Free shows a girl lying on the floor. There are photographs of musicians standing beside music stands in a swamp, and a lot of photographs of protest singers. It all saddens old-time department store pianists, some of whom are still around. They defy anyone to have any fun playing songs from Hair.

The sound of a piano coming through an open living room window was the sound of where the action was during the pre-radio days of big house parties. Anybody who could play the piano was a hero, and publishers of quick courses in piano playing cashed in on it. "Can he really play?" a girl in one ad whispered to a man named Arthur. "Heavens no!" Arthur exclaimed. "He never played a note in his life." Arthur had just finished playing The Rosary, and the room had rung with applause. Then the quick-course student sat down and played Liebestraum, and as the strains died away, the room again resounded with a roar of applause. One of the most awful quick piano systems was a technique in which you played the melody in octaves with your thumb and little finger, and accompanied it with a jump base. You could recognize a student of this school a mile off, and tried to avoid him if possible.

The piano was the object of audience hysteria long before Elvis Presley's hips and Mick Jagger's lilac jump suit. Franz Liszt played like a fiend in an atmosphere of perfume, melted candle wax and perspiration, pounding the piano so hard he broke strings. Women fainted. Sometimes Liszt fainted. Women mobbed him, fought for his snuff box, stole his cigar butts. Another great showman was Paderewski, who caught the public imagination in the 1920s. He was discouraged by his early teachers, who thought he'd never get very far with the piano, but in the 1922-23 season he earned $500,000 as a concert pianist. Women lined up to get a look at him helped along by his business manager who invented the wild rush of fans by giving out free tickets to students - with instructions to go into hysterics and make it look good.

The longest piano piece every composed was the Opus Clavicembalisticum by Kaikhosru Shapurji Sorabje, played by the composer in Glasgow in 1930. It took him 2-3/4 hours. A photograph of a section of the music shows a terrifying mess of chords for both hands in 1/64 notes.

In the 1800s the piano was a symbol of gentility. Every young lady had one or was bucking for one.

The piano was the centre of a whole set of social graces. Etiquette books told girls how to accept invitations to play the piano without looking as if they expected to be asked, and when they went visiting in the evening they took their music just in case. If a girl decided to play, a man took her arm and escorted her to the piano, held her bouquet and her gloves in one hand and turned the pages for her with the other. It was a social grace to know how to turn music: to stand beside the pianist, body poised in an attentive arc, and turn the page at just the right time.

A Massey-Harris action was bait for farmers

Selling pianos to farmers was a brisk business in the early years of this century. The trick was to somehow get the piano into the farmhouse in the hopes that the farmer's daughters would put the pressure on Pop to keep it, and it was done by various stunts, including having a wagon loaded with a piano break down in the farmer's lane. Pianos were traded for livestock; farmers were hustled by high-pressure techniques. One salesman for Heintzman's, who knew that all the farmers swore by Massey-Harris farm equipment, used to tell them that the Heintzman piano had a Massey-Harris action. Piano agencies in rural areas were coveted, and it gives you chills to read some of the correspondence from applicants for the agencies. You can see the mutton-chop whiskers, plug hats and suspicion in the polite, unfriendly, copper-plate script: 'We like to know who we are dealing with. Do you pay cash?"

The piano playing marathon title is held by James Crowley Jr., 30, who played 22 hours a day for 45 days, 8 hours at Scranton, Pa. in 1970.

The silent movie pianist sat beneath the screen and played through a complete show - newsreel, advertising slides, two-reel comedy and feature - without stopping. He kept his eyes on the screen, usually playing by ear and faking endlessly, shifting from music for a gun fight to music for a love scene without a stop, playing louder when the lights went out, often getting to hate kids. Mothers used to send them to the matinee with sandwiches to get rid of them for a few hours and they'd get as close to the piano player as possible and yell and drop sandwiches into the pit. Piano players had nicknames like Piano Bill within the trade, and sometimes a piano player would have a drummer providing sound effects of horns, whistles and bells.

Smashing pianos is considered an art form

Smashing pianos is an advanced art-form with a type of artist who will do anything to avoid work. The fastest time for breaking up a piano and stuffing it through a nine-inch hole is two minutes and 26 seconds. This was done in 1968 at Merton, England by six men representing Ireland.

Piano legs were once considered sexy (they were modestly covered). This was a result of a form of Puritanism usually called Victorian, which reached its most fanatical stage not in England but in North America. In 1850 a London journalist wrote

that it was startling to find a poet like Walt Whitman so popular in a country where piano legs wore trousers, and a turkey's breast was called its bosom. Frederick Maryatt, the navy captain and author of Midshipman Easy, described a square piano in the reception room of a girls' school, and said its legs were covered with modest little trousers, with frills at the bottom.

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EUBIE BLAKE IN NICE, FRANCE

Eubie is playing in Nice, France during the period July 6th thru 16th making special guest appearances during the "Festival". Eubie is accompanied by Terry Waldo. This 10-day Festival takes place outdoors in fairgrounds - on boats - roof gardens, etc.

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Reprinted from THE TORONTO STAR JUNE 2, 1978.

New York Times review

Canadian Brass gets a rave

The Canadian Brass opened a one-week engagement at New York's Beacon Theatre this week with a rave review from New York Times music critic Raymond Ericson.

"The players were startlingly good," Ericson wrote of the ensemble's playing of composer Peter Schickele's brass opera, Hornsmoke, which the musicians perform in crouching and supine positions and while dancing around the stage.

Of its work on other pieces such as Fats Waller's Jitterbug Waltz, Scott Joplin's The Favorite Rag, and Larry Crosley's The Days Before Yesterday, Ericson said the Brass played with "rhythmic verve and an insouciance that were just right for the music."

Ericson began his review in a light-hearted vein: "Canadian Brass is an instrumental quintet, not a national personality trait."

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PERFORMERS: Please keep us posted on your whereabouts and your schedule will appear in this column.

SOMETHING DOING...

JOHN ARPIN - at the Chelsea Inn, 33 Gerrard St. W, Toronto - in 'The Piano Bar" Mon. to Fri. 5:00 p. m. to 8:00 p. m. and with his trio in "The Chelsea Bun" Lounge Mon. to Sat. 9:00 p. m. to 1:00 a. m.

EUBIE BLAKE - The DEAN of RAGTIME - This popular recording artist and composer performs frequently at Concerts and Festivals. Does guest appearances on T. V. talk shows and is often to be heard on radio programs (watch your local press music programs for dates).

STEEN CHRISTENSEN - at the Mechanical Music Museum (MMM), Vesterbrogade 150, Copenhagen, (Denmark) every 2nd & 4th Wed. each month.

DON EWELL - Esplanade Lounge, Royal Orleans Hotel, New Orleans, Louisiana. Piano - ragtime, Morton style, Waller - par excellence.

PETER FAHRENHOLTZ - plays solo ragtime piano and with bands - regularly on tour in Denmark. Occasionally on tours in other European countries.

DAVE FLOWITT - at Brunswick Hotel, Brunswick Street, Toronto with Dr. McJazz Band, Thursday through Saturday, 9:00 p. m. to 1:00 a. m.
- at the Chelsea Inn, 33 Gerrard St. W., Toronto, Sat. 2:00-5:00 p. m. with Chelsea Chasers Trio and Dr. McJazz Band (alt. weeks).

ROBERT GOODNOW - at Broadmoor Hotel, Colorado Springs, Col. Nov. 14 on.

RALPH GRUEGEL - at the Old Allen Theater, Playhouse Square, Cleveland: Ralph Gruegel's Eagle Jazz Band: Once More The Falstaffian Trombonist Steps to Centre Stage. Thursday 9:30 - 1:30.

JOHN HASSE - at The Ordinary, Nashville, Indiana, Fri. and Sat. nights.

TOM JONES - playing regularly in the Cincinnati area.

JIM KAPLAN - at the Pizza-Stein, 1428 W. Galena Ave., Freeport, Illinois on Tues., Fri. and Sun.

TOM LOUGH - playing a single, good time jazz on the piano 4:00 - 8:00 p. m. Fri. at the "Loose Caboose" at Kent State University's Eastway Center, Kent, Ohio

JOHNNY MADDOX - Northern Hotel, Billings, Montana during April.
- Il Porto Ristorante, Alexandria, Va. June 6 - August 6.

GLENN MEYER - and his band at St. Louis, Mo. making regular appearances.

MIKE MONTGOMERY - at The Dakota Inn, Rathskeller, John R. Road north of McNichols, Detroit, Mich. Fri. nights.

MAX MORATH - on the road with his show "The Ragtime Years".

DR. ELI NEWBERGER - and The New Black Eagle Jazz Band at the Stickey Wicket Pub, West Main St., Hopkinton, Mass., Thursday 8:00 p. m. to 12:00 p. m. (Pianist is Bob Pilsbury).

QUEEN CITY RAGTIME ENSEMBLE - performs every Friday and Saturday, approx. 10:00 p. m. with the Queen City Jazz Band, at Zeno's - 1421 Larimer (Downtown) Denver, Col. 80202.

TOM NOEL - on the road with his living portrayal shows "Mark Twain at Home", and "Mr. Jelly Lord" based on the life of Jelly Roll Morton.

RASPILLAIRE AND GISH - a musical husband/wife duo performing ragtime at Shakey's, Orlando, Florida.

SI. RICHARDS	- at Pat Joyce's Rockcliff Restaurant & Lounge, 2589 Wooster Rd., Rocky River, Ohio, 7:00 - 11:00 p. m. Wed. thru Sat.
TOM SCHMUTZLER	- with banjoist Harry Malfas, the Hardware City Temperance & Ragtime Society at "The Ground Round", Plainville, Ct. Fri. & Sat. nights 9:00 p. m. - 1:00 a. m. Also touring schools in southern New England with his own presentation "Our Ragtime Heritage".
BOB SEELEY	- at Charley's Crab Rest., Troy, Mich. I75 at Crook's Road Exit. 4:30 p. m. to 12:00 p. m. Mon. to Fri. 9 to 1 Sat.
RICHARD SKRIKA	- at the piano with the Eric Mannering New Imperial Jazz Band - Lee's Imperial Tavern, Riverside Drive, Windsor, Ontario, Every Sat. 4:00 - 7:00 p. m.
DAN SUMMERS	- and New Charleston Chasers regularly appearing in the Buffalo area.
TREBOR TICHENOR	- on the Goldenrod Showboat, at St. Louis, Missouri every Saturday night. Does weekly radio show on KWMU - FM 90. 7 called "Ragophile with Trebor Tichenor, Fridays 7:00 - 8:00 p. m.
JERRY TRAUNIG	- playing at the "One Way Fare", Simsbury, Conn. Sun. nights.
TERRY WALDO	- has weekly half hour radio show "THIS IS RAGTIME" on National Public Radio - Check your local listing. - Crazy Horse Saloon, Bush Blvd., at Rt. 161 near I-71, Columbus: Ragtime pianist Terry Waldo and singer Susan Lamarche. Sun. & Tues. 9 - 1.
GALEN WILKES	- does weekly half hour radio show "THE RAGTIME YEARS" Tues. 9:00 p. m. 88. 7 FM on WVHC from Hofstra Univ., Hempstead, Long Island, N. Y.
TEX WYNDHAM	- and The Red Lion Jazz Band in the Green Room at the Hotel duPont, 11th & Market Sts., Wilmington, Del. 1st Fri. each month, 8:30 p. m. to 12:30 a. m., A/C 302-656-8121.

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